
XVI. *On the Latin Terms used in Natural History.* By the Rev. John Brand, A. M. A. L. S.

Read January 6, 1795.

THE Latin has been adopted as the language of natural history ; but the latinity of the natural historians has undergone no small censure.

By the adoption of the Latin as the common language of the science, in the degree in which it obtains, new discoveries in it are propagated with great facility. Other branches of philosophy have not had the same good fortune ; and every European nation is become philosophical : and thus, as Monf. D'Alembert has observed, he who devotes himself to the cultivation of any one of them, if he would keep his knowledge up to the level of its state, is reduced to the necessity of flinging away a very valuable part of his life, in acquiring seven or eight languages.

But the latinity of the terms in which natural history is written, has been censured : upon this charge the following remarks may be made.

Such terms must be either primitives or derivatives ; now either of these may be *barbarisms*, when not found in any good Latin author ; or *improprieties* (*verba impropria*, *Quint.*), when, although so found, they are not to be found used in the same sense. This must

must be admitted: but it is here contended, that it does not on this account *alone* follow that they are so. This is proved from the practice of the ancient grammarians in the invention of technical terms, in conjunction with the authority of Tully.

First, the use of a Latin primitive or derivative, in a sense in which it does not occur in any pure Roman writer, is not necessarily an impropriety, technically so called; for if a considerable variation from such an established sense were so, the very grammatical terms of the Roman writers would fall under that censure, as for instance (*articulus*) an article, (*verbum*) a verb. When these terms were first used by grammarians, there was a great variation from their pre-established sense, and their primary significations—a joint, a word.

It is likewise certain, that if grammar had not been reduced into an art among the Romans, these terms would not have been now found in their technical senses in their writings. And if a writer of this age, having reduced the art into a system, had presented the world with the first Latin Grammar, and had given the same names, *verbum*, *articulus*, to the same things, his offence against pure latinity, or the pre-established good use of those words, would have been of the same magnitude as that of the original Latin grammarians, and no more; the same innovations in a language, living or dead, being of equal quality: yet the charge against the propriety of the terms used by such a writer, would be the same in kind as that brought against the natural historians; but it must have fallen to the ground—nor would it have been in degree less strong; for bolder extensions in the sense of Latin terms, are not, that I recollect, to be found in the Lexicon of our technical language. These fastidious grammatical exceptions are, in principle, exceptions both to the art and the philosophy of grammar. If the naturalists err in this point, they err with the grammatical fathers (*cum patribus*).

Secondly, What I have to say about derivatives not used in Latin writers, will be contained in a short comment on a passage in the Academic Questions of Cicero, where he asserts the rights and privileges of those who treat on philosophical subjects in a language not yet enriched with proper terms, and exemplifies his principles in the formation of a new derivative, an authority from which I apprehend no appeal will be made. The translation of this passage is as follows. The original is placed at the end of this article*.

Varro. ‘ You will allow me the same liberty which has always been assumed by the Greeks, who have long pursued these researches; that *to unusual subjects I may apply terms which never have been in use.*

Atticus. ‘ Certainly: but if our Latin language will not furnish them, *you may have recourse to the Greek.*

Varro. ‘ I am obliged to you; but I will endeavour to express myself in Latin, confining myself to such terms of Greek derivation as are already naturalized among us, as philosophy, rhetoric, physics, dialectics. I have therefore formed the new term *Qualitas*, to express the sense of the Greek word *Ποιότης*; which even among them is not a word of common use, but confined to the philosophers. In like manner, none of the terms of the logicians are found in the popular language; and the same is true of the terms of almost all the arts: *to new things new names must be given, or these of others transferred to them.* If the Greeks take this liberty, who have cultivated the sciences for ages, *how much stronger is the reason it should be granted to us, in our first attempt to treat upon them!*

Cicero. ‘ It seems to me, that you will do *a work of utility to the public, if you not only increase the stock of our ideas, which you have already done, but also that of our words.*

Varro.

Varro. ‘ We shall therefore hazard the use of new words when necessary, and by your authority.’

And where the same necessity, arising from the same source, exists, the same liberty is to be taken. And as Cicero, on this point, is an unexceptionable authority, let us examine his practice, to see to what degree it may be carried. The word *Qualitas*, derived from *Quale*, is now familiarized to the ear. The first boldness of this derivative is only perceived by reflection; but its degree will strike us more immediately, if we take the English words *what*, or *such* (as), which answer to the Latin pronominal adjective *Quale*, and add one of the substantive terminations [hood] or [ness] to either, to make a philosophical term of it. I ask the severe grammarians, who protest against the class of new derivatives in the philosophical language of Linnæus, to produce among them a bolder example of the creation of a new term.

And by the same authority, we may defend his imposing new significations on old words; for in a few lines after the conclusion of the extract, there occurs a liberty of this kind, and as remarkable as the former; for Cicero there gives a new sense to the pronominal adjective *Quale*, in correspondence to that of his new derivative *Qualitas*; using it substantively to signify any being or thing, as compounded of substance and accident, or matter and qualities: “ Et ita effeci quæ appellant qualia; e quibus in omni natura co- hærente, et continuata cum omnibus suis partibus, effectum esse mundum.”

It deserves to be remarked respecting these innovations, that this assertion of the legitimacy of the practice in all like cases is here put by Cicero into the mouth of Varro, the greatest critic and grammarian of the Augustan age; who wrote on the Latin language, and addressed his works to Cicero himself.

Hence it appears, that philosophy is not restrained to the use of the common terms of any language; nor, for the same reason, to those of the historians, orators, dramatic writers, poets, &c. of that language, either separately or conjointly: but, as every art has terms of its own, so has every branch of science.

That he who enriches any science with a number of new discoveries, confers a second general benefit, by enriching the language in which he treats of them, by all such terms as shall be requisite to do it in the best manner.

Cicero, repeating his new term *quality*, adds with great philosophical pleasantry, “*Faciamus tractando usitatus hoc verbum, et tritius.*” And it may be said of the terms of natural history, that our elegant classical scholars will find their asperities wear off very soon, if, by adding to their former acquisitions a knowledge of this new philosophy, they make themselves practically versed in the use of them. There may remain some precisely descriptive, which may be yet added; some reformation may be wanted in those which may have been hastily adopted; and from them we may expect it.

It is to be observed, that these arguments defend the liberty, not the licentiousness, of introducing new terms; and defend it upon the footing of necessity only; and therefore extend that liberty no further than such necessity actually extends.

I had thought to have finished here; but having made so much use of the authority of the great ornament of the Roman forum, the sentiments of the elegant expositor of our own laws on this subject are not to be passed by. These, with a minute change to avoid the introduction of fresh matter, are as follows: “This is a
“technical language calculated for eternal duration, and easy to be
“apprehended both in present and future times; and on these ac-
“counts best suited to preserve those memorials which are intended
“to

“ to perpetuate [every discovery in natural history]. It is true indeed,
 “ that many of the terms of art with which it abounds, may, as
 “ Mr. Selden observes, give offence to some grammatical and
 “ squeamish stomachs, who would rather choose to live in igno-
 “ rance of things most useful and important, than to have their
 “ delicate ears wounded by the use of a word unknown to Cicero,
 “ Sallust, or the other writers of the Augustan age §.”

* Cic. Op. omnia, Gronovii. Acad. Quest. L. I.

24. *** Dabit is enim profectò, ut in *rebus iniustis*, quod Græci ipsi faciunt, a quibus hæc jamdiu tractantur, *utamur verbis interdum inauditis*.

25. Nos verò, inquit Atticus. *Quin etiam Græcis licebit utare, cum voles, si te Latina forte deficient.* Bene sanè facis: sed enitar ut Latinè loquar, nisi in hujus modi verbis, ut philosophiam, aut rhetoricam, aut physicam, aut dialecticam appellem, quibus, ut aliis multis, consuetudo jam utitur pro Latinis. Qualitates igitur appellavi, quas *ποιοτητες* Græci vocant: quod ipsum apud Græcos non est vulgi verbum, sed philosophorum, atque id in multis. Dialecticorum vero verba nulla sunt publica; suis utuntur. Et id quidem commune omnium ferè est artium. Aut enim nova sunt rerum novarum facienda nomina, aut ex aliis transferenda, *quod si Græci faciunt, qui in iis rebus tot jam sæcula versantur, quanto id magis nobis concedendum est, qui hæc nunc primum tractare conamur?*

26. Tu verò, inquam, Varro, bene etiam meriturus mihi vide-
 ris, de tuis civibus, *si eos non modo copia rerum auxeris ut effecisti, sed etiam verborum.* Audebimus ergo, inquit, novis verbis uti, te auc-
 tore. * *

§ Blackstone's Commentaries, book iii. ch. 21.